



December 2003

# Quality Assurance Report

*Continuous learning and improvement to serve children and families better*



The D.C. Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) is building the District's first viable safety net for abused and neglected children and fragile families, based on the comprehensive blueprint for child welfare reform contained in the court-ordered Implementation Plan (IP). Collection, analysis, dissemination, and use of both quantitative and qualitative information play key roles in this process.

- Quantitative management information from CFSA's FACES data system provides knowledge about service levels, insights into progress toward performance goals, and a foundation for strategic planning and decision making.
- CFSA's several internal quality assurance initiatives provide research findings to support strategic planning; monitor agency and contractor operations against performance and other standards; and coordinate and conduct specialized meetings to improve the safety, stability, and well being of the children and families we serve.

CFSA has recently developed a Quality Assurance Plan designed to synchronize and elevate our many quality assurance initiatives. Among several key functions, the plan calls for:

- Coordinating and integrating quality assurance activities and findings from Clinical Practice, Information Systems, Licensing & Monitoring, Planning, Policy & Program Support, and other relevant areas within the agency.
- Ensuring continuous, meaningful feedback about quality achievements and challenges throughout CFSA and to external stakeholders.

With this initial *Quality Assurance Report*, CFSA takes an important step in documenting and communicating our progress toward institutionalizing best practices in child welfare. This report is intended to serve as the internal and external voice of our quality assurance function and will appear semi-annually in June and December. This first issue illustrates the content, style, and format we envision for future reports, which will bring together valuable quality information, results, and recommendations from across the agency.

*Beginning December 31, 2003, and every six months thereafter, the Quality Assurance Director will submit to the Director and to the Court Monitor a report summarizing quality assurance activities, the results of the quality assurance process and steps that have been taken or need to be taken to remedy problems or noncompliance with the Modified Final Order. The report shall contain no individually identifiable information and shall be public information.*

*LaShawn A. v. Williams Implementation Plan, April 2003, p. 48*

## Activities

# Quantitative Data Continue to Improve, First Qualitative Review Provides Fresh Insights

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*This section of each report will summarize CFSA's major quality assurance initiatives during the preceding six months.*

## Management Information

In the past, the District's child welfare program suffered from a lack of timely, accurate management information. Today, CFSA routinely relies on management information to support internal planning, daily activities, performance monitoring, and decision making.

- Through our FACES automated information system, we know how many children and families we are serving, the legal status and whereabouts of every child on our caseload—and a great deal more, as sample data in Table 1 show.
- CFSA senior staff, managers, supervisors, and social workers routinely access and use selected portions of over 600 FACES (and other special) reports that provide quantitative information at both the macro (agency/program) and micro (unit/worker) levels.
- CFSA Information Systems (IS) and program managers have forged a sound, working partnership around FACES improvement projects. Semi-monthly meetings of the Change Support Committee provide a forum for discussing program needs, issues, and concerns and deciding on IS priorities. Some priorities have focused on improving system usability and support for current case practice by redesigning FACES screens and on joint program-IS staff initiatives to verify and improve data.

**Table 1:  
Children CFSA Serves,  
Dec. 2003**

<b>Total Children</b>	<b>6,998</b>
• Monitored at home	4,025
• In out-of-home placement	2,973
<b>Demographics</b>	
• <b>Age</b>	
< Age 6	18%
Ages 6-11	33%
Ages 12-17	35%
Ages 18+	14%
• <b>Gender</b>	
Females	49%
Males	51%
• <b>Race</b>	
African-American	86%
All others	14%

*Source: CFSA FACES*

Over the past several months, initiatives in two areas of management information improvement stand out.

**FACES:** An effective automated child welfare management information system can play a major role in helping to ensure child safety, well being, and timely movement to permanent homes. The strategic role of CFSA's FACES system in quality assurance now includes the following.

- Reports showing the status of key case management activities—such as social worker visits to children and plans for moving children toward permanent

homes—are now available online to managers and front-line supervisors. Managers and supervisors routinely use these reports to discuss progress with caseworkers.

- Through an innovative joint project with the District's Family Court, CFSA supervisors and workers now have online access to personal calendars of upcoming court hearing dates, times, and locations and court report deadlines. Each evening, the Family Court downloads information from their computers to CFSA so that supervisors and workers arrive to updated calendars each morning.

**CFSA Geographic Analysis:** CFSA's Office of Planning, Policy & Program Support (OPPPS) offers internal capacity to conduct special research projects that yield comprehensive findings to support strategic decisions. In March 2003, OPPPS prepared a 63-page *CFSA Geographic Analysis: Children and Families in the District of Columbia and Served by CFSA*. It combines geographic data from a number of sources that present an in-depth picture of the District's eight wards and 39 neighborhood clusters and analyzes a variety of indicators for both the general population and CFSA clients.

## **Performance Monitoring**



CFSA's evolution as a performance-based organization is evident in a growing number of initiatives that monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of agency operations. Highlights of recent activities include the following.

**Internal Performance:** Every two weeks, CFSA's management team meets to review and discuss selected portions of a weekly internal update that tracks progress on every requirement in the Implementation Plan. These ongoing reviews focus on both data and performance issues and stimulate corrective action as needed.

**Contractor Performance:** CFSA's Office of Licensing & Monitoring (OLM) regularly monitors District-based group homes and independent living programs serving CFSA children and youth for compliance with District safety and other standards. In addition, OLM monitors the progress of private providers managing CFSA cases in meeting IP performance requirements and in documenting their activities in FACES. OLM conducts a monthly meeting with private-agency directors and managers to review data and performance issues and stimulate corrective action as needed.

**Quality Service Reviews:** In September and October 2003, CFSA collaborated with the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) to conduct our first round of Quality Service Reviews (QSRs). Teams of two researchers interviewed parents, children, family members, and others associated with 40 varied cases to identify strengths and weaknesses in case practice. CSSP provided an oral overview of findings in October. CFSA expects a written report from CSSP early in 2004.

These QSRs reflected the judgment of national experts about how good a job the District's child welfare system is doing in providing quality services and in meeting the goals of safety, permanence, and well being, thus establishing a baseline for assessing future performance. They added a new dimension to the sophisticated quantitative information CFSA has developed over the past two years. A regular cycle of QSRs is included in CFSA's overall Quality Assurance Plan.

## **Best Practices**

CFSA's Office of Clinical Practice (OCP), which includes Quality Assurance (QA), continues to launch new initiatives designed to raise internal case practices to the level of best practices. As they evolve, these activities are providing valuable quantitative and qualitative information while enhancing services to children and families.

- In November 2002, CFSA initiated efforts to improve the quality of administrative reviews (required under the Federal and District Adoption and Safe Families Act and the IP) for new child abuse/neglect cases. Quality Assurance conducts pre-assessments of foster care cases 20 days before their scheduled administrative review. QA reviews case records and provides the social worker, supervisor, and program manager with an evaluation of the child's safety, well being, and progress toward permanence, which highlights issues and stimulates corrective action in advance of the review. QA then follows up to ensure case issues receive attention. In addition, FACES now automatically generates letters to birth and foster parents, attorneys, and other participants six weeks before administrative reviews. Early notification has improved awareness of the process and increased participation in the reviews.
- Also in November 2002, CFSA began to hold 45-Day Case Planning Conferences for new child abuse/neglect cases. Family members, CFSA social workers, and professionals from the community meet to ensure family participation in the initial case plan and timely provision of planned services. These conferences have established a foundation of information and experience CFSA will draw upon to implement Facilitated Family Team Meetings. Institutionalization of this best practice within CFSA is currently in the planning and development stage.

## Results

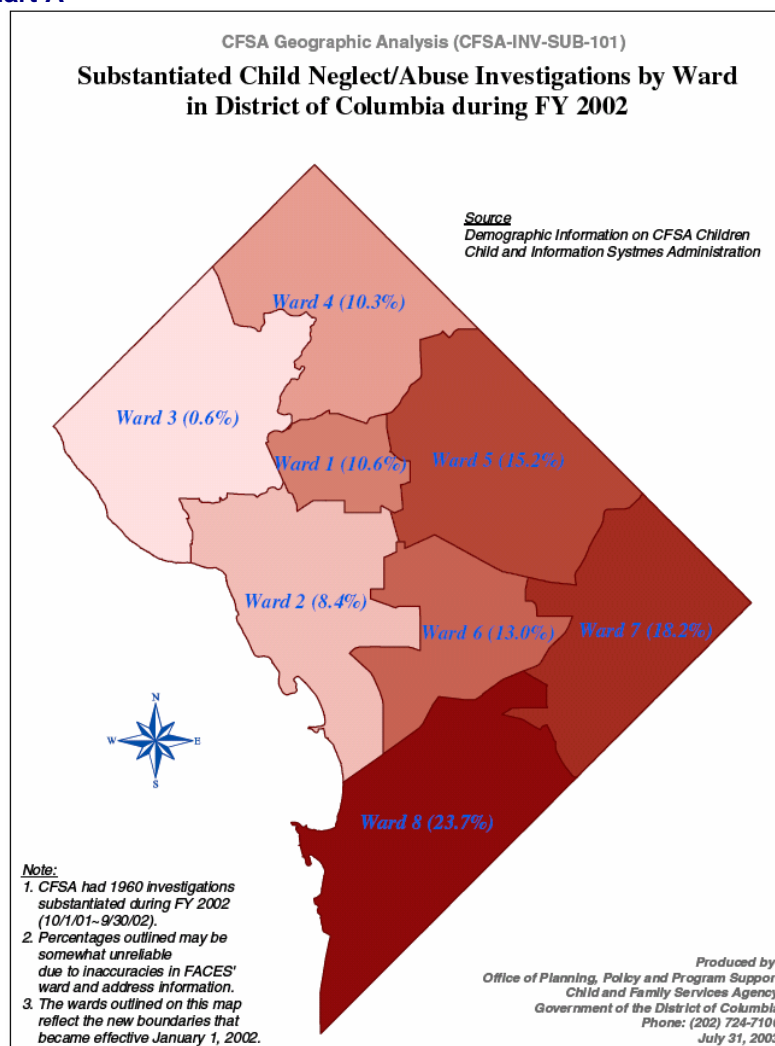
### Steady, Incremental Progress is Evident in Knowledge and Performance

*This section of each report will detail key findings from CFSA quality assurance activities during the preceding six months.*

## **Geographic Analysis Provides Basis for Defined Service Areas**

Text and detailed graphic representations of the city in the *CFSA Geographic Analysis* have increased our knowledge about our overall service area and locations of CFSA clients (and some partners, such as foster parents) within it. For example, Chart A shows the distribution of substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect by District ward. In FY02, fully 70 percent of substantiated cases occurred in Wards 5, 6, 7, and 8.

**Chart A**



We have used information in the *CFSA Geographic Analysis* to devise improved foster and adoptive parent recruitment strategies and have shared the data with provider agencies to inform their planning. It has also allowed CFSA senior managers and the Family Court to develop an approach to serving District children and families geographically. This approach will take effect in January 2004, for new abuse/neglect cases before the court.

## Internal Performance Monitoring

### Highlights Achievements and Areas in Need of Improvement

The court-ordered Implementation Plan sets rigorous performance standards in terms of specific outcomes and strategies for achieving safety, permanence, and well being of children and families involved in the District's child welfare system. Benchmark performance goals occur about every four to six months.

CFSA's semi-monthly management meetings to review progress toward IP requirements have riveted agency attention and resources on maintaining the momentum of reform. As a result, CFSA is constantly aware of areas where progress is on track or lagging. Table 2 provides an overview of our performance on selected IP goals, while Charts B and C display the results of tracking two specific requirements.

**Table 2:**

#### **CFSA Performance on Selected Implementation Plan Goals, Dec. 2003**

##### **Accomplished:**

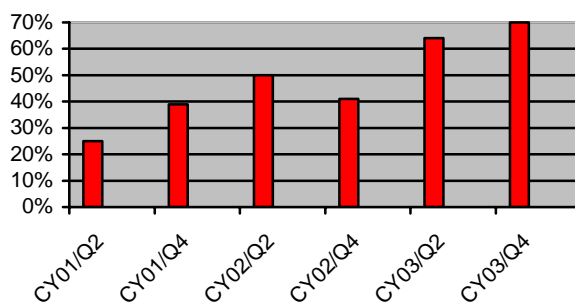
- Reduction of individual social worker caseloads
- Development of timely case plans
- Reduction of children < age 12 in group homes
- Maintaining sibling connections
- Licensing District-based group homes and independent living programs

##### **In Process:**

- Timely completion of investigations
- Social worker visits to children
- Licensing of foster homes
- Quality practice: sense of urgency about permanence, family engagement, and teamwork

*Source: CFSA FACES*

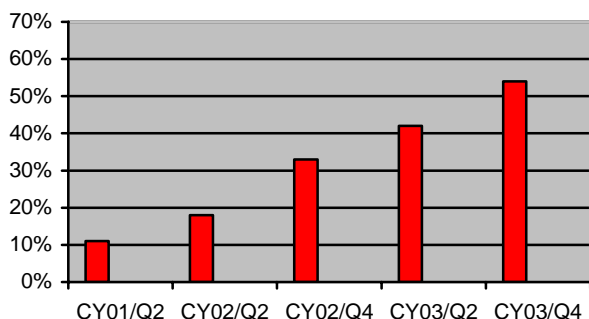
**Chart B:**  
**Foster Care/Kinship Cases with**  
**Current Case Plans**



For foster care and kinship cases with current case plans, the most recent IP performance goal is: *By December 31, 2003, 70% of case plans will be current* (p. 30). CFSA's baseline performance, established in May 2001, was just 25 percent. By the end of 2003, CFSA achieved the target (according to internal FACES data)—an improvement of 180 percent. This was not without some backsliding at the end of 2002. When internal tracking revealed this lag, CFSA took prompt corrective action, leading to a strong performance leap by the second quarter of 2003.



**Chart C:  
Out-of-Home Care Cases Receiving  
Social Worker Visit Monthly**



Because the IP requires rapid change—doubling or tripling performance within a short period, in some cases—CFSA progress in some areas is not yet meeting IP standards while still showing dramatic improvement. Social worker visits to children in out-of-home care are a good example.

The most recent IP goal is: *By December 31, 2003, CFSA or contract social workers with case management responsibility shall make monthly visits to children in out-of-home care (foster family homes, group homes, congregate care, independent living programs, etc.)*

*in 70% of cases* (p. 43). CFSA's performance baseline, established in May 2001, was only 11 percent. By December 2003 (according to FACES), CFSA was making monthly visits to about 54 percent of out-of-home care cases. While short of the goal, this represents a remarkable improvement of almost 400 percent. This critical area requires further leaps in performance, which are now possible as a result of meeting social worker staffing goals at the end of September 2003 and realizing associated significant declines in individual caseloads (shown in Chart D on the following page).

In addition to these examples of how management information is supporting improved performance, this initial *Quality Assurance Report* presents two examples that indicate:

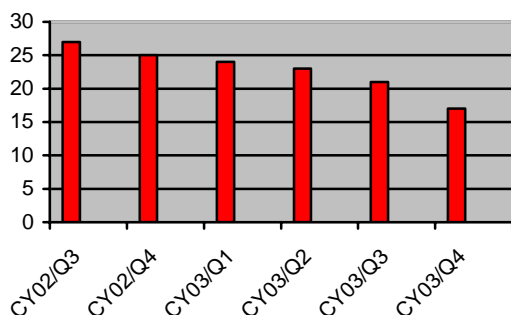
- (1) the kinds of knowledge we are gaining from achievements and
- (2) how we are attacking areas in need of improvement.

**Achievement Example--Caseload:** For many years, public child welfare in the District suffered from acute understaffing. When the District Council established CFSA as a separate, cabinet-level District agency in 2001, some social workers had as many as 70 or 80 cases. Clearly, ensuring the safety, permanence, and well being of children and families is impossible under such circumstances. CFSA had an urgent need to recruit, train, and retain qualified, case-carrying social workers and to reduce individual caseloads to make quality service possible.



By the end of September 2003, CFSA had succeeded in meeting the FY03 staffing goal of 309 case-carrying social workers. The positive impact on the average individual caseload of workers serving families in their homes and children and youth in out-of-home placement is shown in Chart D (source: CFSA Weekly Caseload Count).

**Chart D:  
Average Caseload/  
Social Worker**



The most recent IP performance goal is: *By December 31, 2003, the caseload of each CFSA worker and private agency worker providing services to children, whether in their home or in placement, shall not exceed 23 cases* (p. 49). As of December 26, CFSA's average caseload per worker was 17, consistent with the 23 envisioned in the IP.

The IP requires that all workers will be at or below this level (while allowing flexibility to manage around exigencies, such as social workers going on medical leave or new workers carrying fewer cases during training). As a result, CFSA monitors not only the

average but also the distribution of cases weekly. As of December 26, 80 percent of CFSA workers had no more than 23 cases, and the highest individual caseload was 30.

In this process, we have gained significant knowledge about how to achieve positive change. Action steps that allowed us to aggressively recruit qualified social workers have included:

- Developing a formal, written recruitment plan that includes both traditional and innovative strategies.
- Diligently implementing the plan by participating in numerous career fairs, following up with telephone calls and electronic messages, posting mass mailings to selected students and alumni, and using selected Internet job sites.
- Monitoring results and continuously making mid-course corrections to drop ineffective tactics and refocus resources on approaches producing a payoff. For example, local colleges and universities, regional job fairs, and advertising via print ads and the Internet all proved to be successful. Far less effective were social work conferences and broad targeting of distant colleges and universities.

In addition, CFSA tracks caseloads by supervisory unit and individual worker. A weekly report allows supervisors to shift cases to reduce high caseloads and to assign new workers to units in need of caseload equalization.

***"Now, I can prevent some emergencies."***



*"My top caseload was 45, not the highest in the agency but too high to keep up. I spent all my time bouncing from one emergency to another and going to court. Now, I have 25 cases, and I'm really getting to know these children and families. Sometimes, I can even spot a crisis brewing and step in before it becomes a major emergency."*

Eight-year veteran social worker  
in D.C. child welfare  
(Photograph is an illustration only.)



**Improvement Example—Quality of Practice, Children in Pre-Adoptive Placement:**

A sense of urgency about permanence is important because children are constantly growing and need stability for healthy emotional development. CFSA has an obligation to reform one of the most tragic failures of the past by preventing children from languishing in foster care or waiting years to be adopted. Several performance goals in the IP address this issue. One example is the requirement to move adoptable children into adoptive placements within nine months. Table 3 shows how quickly IP performance benchmarks climb for this standard, reflecting the imperative of all due speed in obtaining nurturing, permanent homes for growing youngsters.

CFSA barely met the most recent benchmark, with 549 (50.9%) of 1,078 total adoptable children in pre-adoptive placement. In that process, we recognized we must be much more proactive to achieve permanence quickly for the remaining 529 children waiting to be adopted—and for all children who become available for adoption in the future. CFSA has developed a strategy for speeding development of specific recruitment plans for children available for adoption but not yet in pre-adoptive placement. Approaches include:

**Table 3:  
IP Benchmarks for Percentage  
of Adoptable Children  
in Pre-Adoptive Placement  
within Nine Months**

Sept. 30, 2003	50%
Dec. 31, 2004	75%
Dec. 31, 2005	85%
Dec. 31, 2006	"full compliance"

- Conducting regular permanency planning staffings for all adoptable children in need of a specific recruitment plan. Participants include the social worker and supervisor, CFSA Adoption staff, legal representatives, and other professionals involved in the case. Objectives of the staffings are to consider a variety of options for moving children into appropriate pre-adoptive placements and actually matching them with prospective adoptive parents who can meet their needs.
- Dedicating four coordinator-facilitator teams to schedule, conduct, and follow up on staffings.
- Working with an expert consultant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation who is reviewing and recommending improvements to this process.

**Isiah (Birthday: October 9, 1997)**

***"Want to shoot some hoops? Will you read me a story?"***

Isiah is an alert six-year-old who wants to captain a ship when he grows up. He's energetic and heads straight for the monkey bars and sliding board on the playground. He's also involved in basketball and martial arts. Isiah enjoys cartoons, computers, story time, arts and crafts, and playing with his friends. His favorite foods are chicken nuggets and French fries. Ideal adoptive parents will provide stability, reassurance, and support to help Isiah overcome the significant loss and rejection he has experienced. Won't you open your heart and home to this great kid?

**For information about adoption, call (202) 671-LOVE.**



## Action Steps

### Reform Requires New Attitudes as Well as Behaviors

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*This section of each report will present steps that have been or need to be taken to meet Implementation Plan requirements and overcome obstacles to successful child welfare reform.*

## Implementation Plan: A Framework for Reform



The IP provides an ambitious framework for child welfare reform in the District. Many of the action steps needed to build on strengths and address challenges are included in the rigorous deadlines and expectations contained in its 60-plus pages. For example . . .

**Timely completion of investigations:** In December 2003, CFSA established policy that sets clear, specific expectations for each investigation of alleged child abuse/neglect. We are also revising and improving the safety assessment instrument investigators use to guide and standardize investigations. In January and February 2004, CFSA will provide training for Intake & Investigations workers about the new policy and instrument. To reduce individual caseloads for investigators, CFSA is working to recruit experienced staff.

**Social worker visits to children:** Reducing individual caseloads was the essential prerequisite to increasing social worker visits to children. As individual caseloads decline, CFSA continues to track accountability via weekly reports showing visits to children by supervisory unit and by individual worker. CFSA has also drafted a comprehensive policy covering visits to children. When that policy is approved, we will conduct internal training on it.

**Foster home licensing:** For foster homes that contracted providers license, CFSA is moving toward performance-based contracting and has increased Licensing & Monitoring staff to enforce performance and quality expectations. For foster homes CFSA licenses, important progress includes improving FACES reports, increasing accountability, sharing successful strategies, and applying those strategies to specific homes where the licensing process appears to be lagging.

## Changing the Culture for Success



CFSA's agenda also involves addressing a fourth critical area: improving the quality of our work even as we continue to increase our insights about quantity. As a variety of information sources (including the recent QSRs) have indicated, achieving our over-arching goals of improved safety, speedy permanence, and better overall current and future well being for every child and teen CFSA serves means transforming our practices to reflect our underlying values. At every step, we must move toward permanence with an urgency that reflects a child's sense of time, engage a child's whole family, create teams that draw on

the expertise of everyone who cares for the child, and hold ourselves and our partners fully accountable for quality and results.

In the past, child welfare social workers had caseloads so large that they could focus only on immediate emergencies involving children's safety. Now that caseloads are coming down to a reasonable level, we have an obligation to do much more. Further, this dramatic improvement in practice must go beyond CFSA to encompass the entire child protective system. For child welfare reform to succeed in the District, we must continue to engage the Family Court, our contracted and community partners, and our colleagues at a range of child-serving agencies.

This broad agenda of practice change involves several key strategies currently in process. Following are three examples.

**Facilitated Family-Team Meetings:** During the summer of 2003, CFSA initiated a project to improve decision making around initial placement and placement changes of children and youth in out-of-home care. This project addresses requirements in both the IP and Child in Need of Protection legislation currently before the District Council. The goal is to institutionalize Facilitated Family-Team Meetings (FFTM), widely recognized as a best practice within child welfare, within CFSA. In an FFTM, family members, CFSA social workers and other experts, and a variety of professionals from the community come together to review the needs of the child, explore family strengths and requirements to meet those needs, and identify community-based and other services available to support the child and family. CFSA is planning to implement Facilitated Family-Team Meetings by July for all children experiencing initial placement in out-of-home care. In October, CFSA will expand the process to include children requiring a placement change.



**Practice Model:** It did not take long for the group working to institutionalize Family Team Meetings within CFSA to recognize that this broad-based change could not be implemented effectively without being placed within an equally broad-based context. A task force of community and CFSA members on the group developed a draft practice model as a first attempt to define the philosophy that must underlie quality child welfare practice and performance. At the same time, some CFSA group members conducted research to obtain samples of practice models from other child welfare systems. It is now up to CFSA to complete the practice model, thus establishing the essential foundation of guiding principles for serving children and families that every child welfare agency needs.

**Training Plan:** CFSA has developed an FY04-05 Training Plan that represents a leap forward in addressing the need for new knowledge, skills, and attitudes at all employee levels. It builds on major progress so far in reforming CFSA's pre-service training curriculum, so that new social workers now spend four months in a combination of classroom and on-the-job training in supervised training units. In FY04, the training plan calls for a substantial commitment to enhance skills in key practice areas for CFSA and

private-provider staff at both the supervisory and worker levels. Goals and major strategies include:

- Using training aligned with core values and desired outcomes for children and families to jump start practice change.
- Focusing on key areas a range of information sources (such as the QSRs and focus groups) have identified as critical to practice change: family engagement and assessment, case planning and permanence, and communicating with Family Court.
- Communicating practice expectations and guidelines and supporting staff in meeting them.
- Sending a powerful message about change by rapidly rolling out training for direct-services employees at all levels—CFSA and contractor supervisors, social workers, and assistants in that order.
- Providing opportunities for contractors to participate in shaping CFSA's training curriculum.